



## Reply to the letter: What can paintings teach us?

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#### To the Editor,

We would like to thank Śniadecki et al. for their correspondence [1]. In the case of Michelangelo's "The Flood," the argument is not simply about whether the painting depicts an actual clinical case, but rather about how the painter represented the signs of a disease. It should be stressed that this fresco primarily has a theological meaning which metaphorically uses pathology to express the caducity of life, decay, punishment, and ending – as in the case of "The Night", which also refers to vanitas or eternal sleep, death [2]. Furthermore, there is a recurrent morphological difference between the two breasts, which, given Michelangelo's exceptional artistic skills, cannot be interpreted as a mistake. While it is impossible to determine the intent of the artist, the visual elements strongly evoke this diagnostic interpretation. Even if we were to hypothesize, as you suggest, that Michelangelo "photoshopped" a male torso by overlaying feminine features, the fact remains that the artist created an image that depicts a pathological breast condition. While iconodiagnosis cannot provide definitive answers, it serves as a valuable interdisciplinary tool to bridge art and science [3,4], fostering deeper reflection on the ways in which we perceive and address illness throughout history.

#### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Serena Di Cosimo:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Antonio Perciaccante:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing. **Simon T. Donell:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing. **Judith Wimmer:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Andreas G. Nerlich:** Writing – review & editing. **Johann C. DeWaal:** Writing – review & editing. **Laura Cortesi:** Writing – review & editing. **Raffaella Bianucci:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

#### Disclaimers

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